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ATG Interviews Ron Klausner

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President, ProQuest Information and Learning

by Katina Strauch (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: *ProQuest has gone through several name changes over the years. How has this affected your marketing operation and positioning in the marketplace? How about your internal organization?*

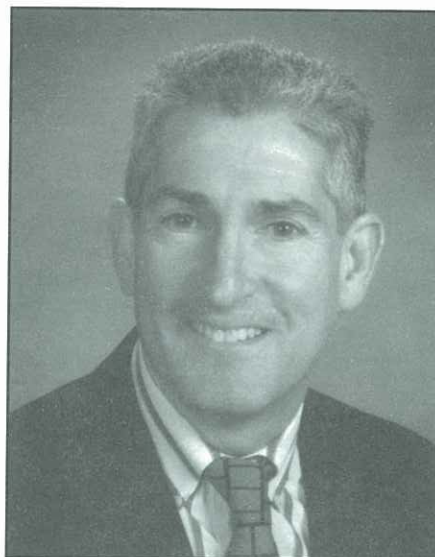
RK: Over time, our company has successfully transformed from microfilm archiving and aggregation to a digital publisher of all sorts of information for scholarly research. We provide innovative research tools for educational and corporate markets worldwide. I like to think our branding has evolved along with our products — and our customers and associates have been receptive to the changes. ProQuest is a trusted, respected brand.

ATG: *ProQuest (as UMI and Bell & Howell) used to be a microfilm and CD-ROM company. What has the move to electronic resources done to your business positioning?*

RK: We use different methods to anticipate customer needs and changes in the marketplace. We have approximately 250 sales and customer service producers around the world and they do an outstanding job in understanding what is important to customers.

Customers have told us that being able to find and use unique content is important. Specialty electronic publishing — making digital products that are editorially rich and possess unique content, has been a growth area.

ATG: *You came to ProQuest from Dun & Bradstreet. How did/does this influence ProQuest?*



RK: I've found the people at ProQuest to be committed to excellence and customer care. They are very strong customer advocates. I have been told I'm good at leading an organization with thoughtful, selected priorities — priorities that are mapped to our strategy and are executed with speed and simplicity.

Both companies deliver results for shareholders while focusing on customers first — but not at the expense of our third constituency, ProQuest associates (the other two — shareholders and customers). Although D&B is a larger global firm and ProQuest is considerably smaller, the business basics, principles, and values are similar.

ATG: *ProQuest became a public company in the 90s, I believe. How has that changed your business positioning? Are earnings more important to ProQuest than they were when you were a private company?*

RK: Bell & Howell (our former name) was listed on the NYSE in 1995. The name ProQuest Company debuted in June 2001. Many people have invested in our company to create and support our success. We have an obligation to those people to use their money wisely and to generate a reasonable return for the investment they made in us. We have to find a balance in creating value for our customers, a rewarding work environment for our associates and solid financial results for our shareholders.

ATG: *Who are your competitors? Is Ebsco Publishing your main competitor? In terms of your microfilm business, isn't your main competitor yourself?*

RK: We have many competitors, and, frankly, that's a good thing. Businesses always perform better when they have to compete to meet customers' needs.

Rather than focus on what competitors are doing, we focus on what customers want. We've made a great many improvements to the ProQuest interface in the past year — and we continue to add features and improve existing functionality. We work to deliver what our customers want in order to enhance research and learning with features such as expanded date range searching, OpenURL linking, powerful world-class indexing, new ways to group and filter results, and in July, we'll introduce ProQuest Smart Search and email capabilities that will again lead the market. That's on top of our superior content, for which we are also dedicated to providing the best.

We don't see microfilm and digital resources as competitive. Each has its place and librarians value both formats. The content we offer on microfilm is unique. Much of it is not offered electronically and most cannot be found anywhere else.

ATG: *I was recently reading about the instability of CD-ROMs and DVDs as long-term archival media. How stable is microform? As libraries move more and more toward electronic, will ProQuest continue to produce microform? For that matter, how stable is digital media?*

RK: Microfilm lasts for centuries, if stored and treated properly. Librarians value the archival and preservation features of the medium. Despite the growth of electronic products, there is still demand for our microfilm products because they may be the only source of out-of-print information, they're an economical alternative for storing information, and they last a long time. We fully intend to continue to produce microform, and, in fact, we continue to add to our microform product offerings.

Digital media doesn't yet have the track record that microfilm has, but we continue to work on standards committees to help establish best practices and ensure that necessary conversions and updates take place. Technology is ever evolving; as it advances, we intend to stay in the forefront for our customers.


ATG: *You have done many one-time purchase products (APS, EEBO) ... rather than subscription products (current NY Times online). This is good for libraries, but not necessarily good for continuing business. Would you comment on this strategy and its long-term growth potential?*

RK: One of our guiding principles is that if we place the interests of customers first, we will be successful.

We serve many different kinds of libraries with different needs and resources. The largest university libraries find it easiest to fund purchases. Smaller academic libraries,

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balances, we would do well to do so only after prolonged and open debate. 

Endnotes

1. Joe Cox, "Where Are the Industry, the Profession and the Art Headed," *Charleston Advisor*, 5, no. 3 (January, 2004) p.51. Cox insists that library expenditures have decreased from an average of four percent of total university expenditure in 1980 to less than three percent today. He insists that "in the quest for funding, librarians have failed to preserve their fair share."
2. Michael Mabe, "Peer Review and Pay to Publish: The World Turned Upside Down," *Against the Grain* (June 2004), p. 3.
3. Elsevier's Comments on Evolutions in Scientific, Technical and Medical Publishing and Reflections on Implications of Open Access Journals for the UK." (February 2004). p.10. http://www.elsevier.com/authorised_news/corporate/images/UKSTIElsevier_position_paper_on_stm_in_UK.pdf.

and almost all of our public library customers, prefer subscribing, because of its lower budget impact.

We continue to digitize information from our microfilm collection — and other sources — to create and publish new products that will drive revenue growth. We have a virtual treasure of information in our vaults. Our proprietary products have unmatched depth of content that appeal to our existing markets as well as to new ones.

ProQuest Historical Newspapers is a good example — the full-run of top national newspapers from their first issue in page-image format. With *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *The Los Angeles Times*, it's a highly desired product and available only from **ProQuest**.

ATG: *Last year I believe you bought SIRS which strengthened you in the K-12 market. Do you have plans to make more acquisitions of companies? Partnerships? What types of companies are you considering/would you consider?*

RK: Our **SIRS** acquisition enhances our leadership in the K-12 library market and diversifies our offerings with strong topic-specific content. **SIRS** gives us greater visibility in the libraries that are our current customers and access to libraries that are not already customers. If we are going to continue to lead our industry, we need to acquire companies that will fit well with our current product line and our future plans.

One of our strategies for growth is acquiring other companies for their human talent, content, products and technology. This year, we have aggressive acquisition plans and have already announced our acquisitions of **Reading A-Z** and **Copley Publishing**. We have a dedicated team involved in identifying, researching, recommending, and integrating companies that we acquire. We will continue to acquire companies that enhance our leadership position and meet needs for our customers.

ATG: *You have recently announced partnerships with BePress to digitize dissertations and you are digitizing content in other areas. Can you comment on this? What sells in the library market these days?*

RK: We continually engage our customers to get their feedback — good and bad. We also bring other parties into the electronic creation of our vast library of content and other content that exists outside of **ProQuest**. We believe there are many partners we can collaborate with to continue the growth of our material. In doing so, we can work with others to help bring products to market while expanding the possibilities of information access.

ATG: *Tell us about yourself and your family. What are your passions? What do you like to read?*

I have three daughters with a range from a senior in college to a pre-K and a wonderful bride.

We engage in numerous activities as a family, and it is my #1 passion. A bike ride in the mountains back east is one of our pleasures. I love reading especially books that provide a break from the business world. I often read the "airplane fast-paced book," such as **Harlan Coben**, **Stephen Frey**, and **John Grisham**. Currently I am finishing a **Frey** book (I have read all of his). On vacation I read something more robust. I expect to read the **Franklin** and **Churchill** bestsellers this summer in between days at the lake and bike riding with my family. 🌿

ATG Profiles Encouraged

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BORN & LIVED: Allahabad, India. My father taught dairy technology at an agricultural college in India for 38 years, my mother was there for 35 years as a dietitian and homemaker (they were married in Mumbai).

EARLY LIFE: Most of my schooling from primary through high school was at **Woodstock School**, a boarding school in the foothills of the Himalayas in Mussoorie, Uttaranchal, India. I was raised with the strong influences of Indian culture and the international, interdenominational missionary community associated with the school.

FAMILY: A son, James, who graduated from **Berklee College of Music** in August, 2003, and is an audio engineer for a recording studio in Pittsburgh; and a husband who has his own set of 4 children and 9 grandchildren.

EDUCATION: B.A., **Central Washington University**; M.A. in Linguistics, **University of Oregon**; M.L.I.S., **UC Berkeley**.

FIRST JOB: First paying job - cleaning maid at a nursing home/retirement center in Seattle. First library job - Cataloging clerk, **Portland State University Library**.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Worked 6 years as a paraprofessional in libraries. After MLIS, first had two temporary positions — one at the **Oregon State Library** and next at **Western Oregon University**. Then got a real job as a monographic cataloger at the **University of Idaho**. Moved across country to become the Technical Services Librarian at **The College of Wooster** in 1988. I've worked in almost all areas of libraries (cataloging, collection development, documents, ILL, instruction, reference, serials, systems). Am currently at the end of a three-year stint running a grant-supported cooperative collection development project. I'm involved in state cooperative collection development activities through the **OhioLINK** Collection Building Task Force and the **Academic Library Association** of Ohio's Collection Management Interest Group.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Do things with my hands. My latest acquired skill is chair caning. I also putter around in my own fashion (hate following patterns or recipes) with cooking, basketry, sewing, and other handwork; and I spend a lot of time digging in the garden. I don't have enough spare time to do everything I'd like to do.

FAVORITE BOOKS: I've enjoyed various authors and genres at different stages of life. I have a special fondness for **Emily Carr**, the late Canadian writer and artist. I read a lot of fiction by authors from South Asia or the South Asian diaspora. In my reading for cooperative collection development I have gotten sidetracked into the philosophy of the book (e.g., **Walter Ong**, **Roger Chartier**) and find it all fascinating though a bit beyond this bear of little brain.

PET PEEVES: Having spent my formative years outside of this country, I'm greatly annoyed by those who believe that the "American way of life" is a deliberate entitlement from God.

PHILOSOPHY: Can't think of a pithy statement — life is too complex to reduce to a single one.

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: I have really enjoyed working on the cooperative collection development project, but whether that is ultimately meaningful is for others to judge.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: I hope I'll be a step closer to figuring out what I want to be when I grow up, and continue to be learning and exploring new things.

WHERE DO I SEE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: GenXers and beyond will have more influence and will be changing the shape of the profession. We will still be grappling with many of the same issues we are now, though balances may be tipped in ways we can't now anticipate. Librarians and information professionals will still be arguing about what to call themselves and will still be running hard to try to keep up with the ever-evolving information landscape. 🌿

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